Chapter 36

NOT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION

I met Dave in Palenque. He had started a company selling experimental research chemicals that were labeled "not for human consumption," although most of them could be found in the back pages of Sasha Shulgin's books. Sitting by the pool one day, I heard Dave tell how he had studied to be a priest but dropped out to become a professional masseur. By some circuitous route—a typical tangled American odyssey—he made his way from the Miami Beach yacht scene to psychedelics and the cutting edge of mind-expansion. In Palenque, Dave invited me to join his private research group, giving me free and low-priced introductions to some new chemicals, as well as his regular catalog of little-known and unscheduled compounds. (Fearing intensified government surveillance, he would close his company the day after the September 11 terrorist attacks, even though his business was not clearly illegal.)

Back in New York, I ordered a few things from his catalog. They came to my home in plain envelopes labeled with intimidating chemical names. For $125, I bought one gram of a yellowish powder called DPT, dipropyltryptamine, a chemical cousin of DMT, substituting propyl for methyl.

Propyl and methyl are simple carbon compounds, two of the

building blocks of organic matter. There is, for example, methyl alcohol, wood alcohol, and propyl alcohol, rubbing alcohol. In gas form, there is propane and methane. The tryptamine molecule is the building block of many neurotransmitters, and of many psychoactive compounds. Serotonin is a tryptamine. As far as I can ascertain, DPT, unlike DMT, does not occur in nature, which means it did not exist until it was synthesized in a laboratory a few decades ago. While DMT, an endogenous chemical inside the body, is recognized by MAO enzymes and immediately neutralized, DPT, a new concoction, is not. Therefore it crosses the blood-brain barrier through direct sniffing or swallowing. But the most astonishing aspect of the two chemicals is that, despite their similarity, they reveal completely different worlds. Why is this the case?

In Shulgin's book and on the Internet I found accounts of DPT trips. Some described the effects as terrifying: "The whole universe falls apart, all colors in electrik air whirlpool into a mandala, eaten up forever. That's it, the world's over." Others felt, after smoking the drug, they entered, for the first time, the "clear light" of God. Another report was more narrative: "I was being led by a wise old man who I know was God. . . . I was handed a Torah for me to carry as a sign that I had been accepted, and forgiven, and come home." Shulgin also mentioned a church in New York, Temple of the True Inner Light, which uses DPT as its sacrament. Clearly DPT was a serious mind-warper. I put the slim envelope of powder in the refrigerator, where it sat for months.

I am often caught between a desire for new and intense altered states and anxiety. When you pass through a doorway to what may actually be a different dimension, there is no guarantee that you will emerge as exactly the same person you were before. After your first serious LSD or mushroom or DMT trip, you really are never quite the same—you have been given an alternate perspective on your psyche, you have been relativized. You may spend the rest of your life suppressing the memory, but it is still there inside of you. After DPT, I understood what Don Juan told Castaneda: "We are men and our lot is to learn and to be hurled into inconceivable new worlds."

Psychedelics are catalysts for transformation, and when you take them, you have to be ready to transform. Our society seems to be changing rapidly, but the psychedelic realms move with a tremendous

velocity. They make the achievements of our present-day technology seem tragically antique. While these chemicals should not be demonized or trivialized, they also cannot be reduced to therapeutic tools. They are more powerful than our categories. Someday, they may help us establish a science of the spirit. At the moment, all we can say is that they should be treated with tremendous respect. It is good to be scientifically precise about dosages and reaction times, to know, as best as you can, what the chemical will do to you, and why you are taking it. Because I didn't know exactly what DPT was, or what I wanted from it, I bought it and then sheepishly left it alone.

My cautious resistence to the DPT lure continued until one night, after a party. For the first time in months I was drunk. I was with two old friends, twin brothers, who were eager to try the DPT in my fridge. We each snorted a line, and for me it was an interesting disaster. I was both drunk and tripping. On the one hand, the world was a woozy mess; on the other hand, I was seeing it with a razor-edge precision and in the most vibrant colors. When I closed my eyes, I saw muticolored three-dimensional triangles rotating in deep space. I realized later that I had foolishly used alcohol to overcome my fear of DPT the way I used to drink for the courage to talk to girls at bars. I didn't like DPT. The DPT realm seemed icy, annihilating. I told my friends over and over again, "This is evil. This is not to be explored. This is the wrong doorway." In retrospect, I don't think I was exploring the DPT realm on that trip. I think, instead, the DPT realm was beginning its exploration of me.

Because this is a story not just about chemicals but about occult correspondences and psychic events, I will note that later that night we went out to a bar and started talking to the people next to us. For some reason I talked about the end times and 2012, the Hopi and Mayan prophecies. One of our neighbors described a vivid dream she had when she was a teenager that had stayed with her ever since: "I was in a spaceship full of people. We were lifting off from Earth. I looked back at the Earth and there was brown crust where the land had been. We shot into space and went a long way. Then an angel appeared to us. He said that God had decided to rejuvenate the Earth, even though we had ruined it. He was going to start again, do it all over from scratch. For the time being we were going to have to wait in limbo. And he pointed

to a vast gray space where many people were already waiting. We had to leave the spaceship to go there."

It was another few months before I tried DPT again.

In the meantime, another new friend from Palenque accepted my invitation and came to New York. This was Charity the fire dancer. Twenty-four years old, skilled at Tarot and ceremonial magic, a professional stripper, she was the fearless and pixielike embodiment of the new culture I had found at Burning Man. In Mexico, I told her I could find her a free place to stay in New York, and she hitchhiked all the way from Palenque with her cat, Prometheus, catching rides from truckers at truck stops. Unlike me, Charity had no fear of new psychedelics. She kept a list of all the drugs she had tried, and the number was up to forty-three. I told her I had this DPT stuff around, and of course she wanted to try it.

Charity and I took DPT at my house one night—once again, I had to overcome an intense initial reluctance. Finally I put some of the yellowish powder into a pill and swallowed it, but got no effect. She sniffed a line, and almost instantly went into a trance. When her trip was over, she told me I had to try sniffing it. She had seen incredible things.

Sometimes, when you trip, it seems that all of the psychic matter, swirling around in the hours and days beforehand, gathers together, like particles galvanized by a magnet, and pushes the journey in a certain direction. These influences can seem like the karmic trace of some larger pattern or subconscious intention. Earlier that night Charity had told me about the "psychic vampires" who roamed the streets of San Francisco, some of them homeless hippies, who would pick up vibrations from strangers, talk to them, and suck their energy away. I laughed at this. We also talked about the books of Zecharia Sitchin, whose scholarly research convinced him that a race of extraterrestrial giants had created human beings, long ago, to serve them as slaves—a variation on the concept of the "Archons" from Gnosticism. According to Sitchin, the magnificent cruelty of the alien race that created us was beyond our imagining.

Charity cut two big lines of the DPT on the table, and I snorted one. The powder burned my nasal passages. Bitter residue dripped down the back of my throat. I stretched out on the couch. I closed my eyes and entered the DPT realm.

We were listening to moody techno music. With each change in beat, with each skitter of sampled noise, I saw a brand-new and extremely detailed demonic realm swirl before me in cobalt, scarlet, purple gossamer hues. At moments there seemed to be some incredibly elegant yet violently orgiastic party taking place with beautiful females in evening gowns and men in Edwardian topcoats in the spacious parlors of a huge and opulent mansion. At other times there seemed to be bat or butterfly-winged creatures—long and quivering antennaes, velvet coats and emerald eyes, stiletto talons—rising into otherworldly skies, wandering futuristic cities. I had an impression of tremendous vanity. "I" was being used as a mirror for the DPT beings to admire themselves. But their realm was far beyond what can be expressed in ordinary language in its speed of transmutation, its shivering quicksilver beauty.

The worlds revealed were like endless facets of a twirling diamond—I felt the real possibility of being trapped inside any of those facets, a kind of soul-prison, for eternity. That was the terror of it. As with smoking *Salvia*, I had the sense that some part of me had always been stuck in this Gothic DPT prison, trapped there eternally. I somehow understood that this was not my first visit, nor my last.

For a flicker of forever, I was imprisoned in a postmodern bar surrounded by gleaming mirrors with a hyperslick lounge lizard wearing a white mohawk and synthetic fabrics. He was sitting at the bar, drinking a highball. There were no doors or windows in this room, no escape possible. The graphics of this vision were high-res and hyperperfect. Other shards of the DPT realm shared this sci-fi quality. DPT was a postmodern demonic MTV psychedelic.

The sleek, rhythmical mesh of the music seemed woven into the lurid fabric of the darkness, the revelation of sinister forces coming to life behind my eyelids.

Like DMT, the level of visual organization of the DPT realm was far beyond anything that the synaptical wiring of my brain could create—it was, in its own peacock-feathery way, not just as real as this reality, but far more real, crackling with power. I felt from the entities exploring my mind a kind of contempt, a disdain for human beings trapped in our pitifully unsophisticated domain, our meat realm. They seemed somewhere between bemused and enraged that we had trespassed.

In shamanic cultures, the taking of entheogenic substances is always surrounded by ritual. A circle of protection is created, the four directions invoked, the spirits asked for their blessing through an offering of tobacco and prayer. Because we were sniffing a chemical powder in a modern New York apartment, a chemical without a long history of human use, it didn't even occur to us to take such precautions. I was jealous of Charity because she managed to get to the kitchen sink and throw up. She vomited four or five times in a row—later she said she saw a male entity in the sink with a kind of device or machine that he was using to soak up the energy she was expulsing, jeering at her as he did it. The demon told her his name but she couldn't recall it. I couldn't throw up. I suspected that I had finally, and completely, managed to destroy myself. I was convinced I would never recover from this onslaught. I staggered to the CD player and changed the music to Bach, which helped a little. With my eyes opened, transformational energy seemed to be crawling over everything, flickering and receding like waves of sentient power—vampiric electricity. My hands looked and felt like claws made out of wires. When I opened my eyes on ayahuasca, I also felt and saw energy passing like a wave form, but it was more human somehow. Here the speed of the waves was much faster and more brutal than the *yagé* flares. The experience was unmammalian, futuristic, inhuman.

Not only was it suddenly obvious that there was such a thing as a soul, it was also clear that I was in danger of losing mine permanently.

I somehow understood that the DPT realm had evolved over an incredibly long period—millions of years, if time has the same kind of meaning to its inhabitants as it does to us. I realized there are diabolical hierarchies, secret cabals, vast libraries of wickedness to be studied over millennia. It was obvious that we little human beings have absolutely no idea what is going on in the cosmos. The word *baroque* doesn't even begin to describe the jaded emptiness and sublime beauty of that evanescent empire. A little bit like soft candle-flimmer worlds one sees on hash and opium, but etched in perfect solid-state reality—more than photographic. The sleekness of the DPT dimension was beyond belief.

About half an hour into the trip, past three A.M., I called my friend Tony.

"This is total magic, total sorcery. I am watching endless Gothic

demon universes mirroring each other," I babbled. "If someone could be at home here, learn to control things here, they could gain such power they could just walk right through the walls of the White House, do anything, but it wouldn't matter, because they would already be part of such an ancient conspiracy." I had begun to pace around the house, and as I paced, I found that I was moving my arms in the air, making "passes" like the shamanic gestures described in Castaneda's work. These gestures came to me intuitively. They helped control the overwhelming sense of assault.

"Daniel, don't be taken in by it. It's just samsara," Tony said. His voice was a soothing lifeline. He laughed at me. He tried to convince me that the trip would end soon, that I wasn't permanently fried. He told me I should have known what I was doing, since I had called DPT "evil" after my first attempt.

"What's that music you're playing in the background?" he asked.

"Bach," I told him. "It's the only thing that's keeping me together. Perhaps that's why they are here; the demons are attracted to the music. They are crowding in here to be close to it."

"Well, that's nice," he said.

"There's nothing nice about that!" I screeched at him. "They are totally defiant. They don't give a shit about us; we are their puppets."

But at this point the trip was starting to wind down. In a few minutes Charity and I were back in that miraculous illusion of stability we call "reality" once again. I felt incredibly relieved. "Wow, I can't believe it," I said to Tony. "Reality . . . this is definitely a good thing!"

In the next few days, however, I learned that I wasn't quite back in reality after all, or if I was, it was a new, hypercharged one.

I was supposed to leave to meet my girlfriend in Berlin the next day. In the morning my travel agent came up with an affordable last-minute ticket. On the plane, I sat next to a German woman dressed in black. I was reading *The Invisible Landscape* by Terence and Dennis McKenna, and I noticed she seemed startled after she read a few words from the back cover over my shoulder. She had read the word *shamanism*. Halfway through the flight, she told me she had been having a series of dreams over the past months in which two American Indians, a couple, came into her house and told her that she was meant to be a shaman, that she wasn't supposed to get married. She was meant to

devote herself to shamanism totally. The dreams mystified her. She had never thought about shamanism and she had little idea what it was. "Do you know anything about it?" she asked.

I tried to explain the basics of shamanism and gave her the titles of some books to read. Also I told her what I believed, what I had learned from Robert: "The Indian cultures have been almost wiped out, but shamanism is an essential human phenomenon connected to the earth. Right now, the shamans of the past are looking for candidates who can carry on the traditions. They have zeroed in on you as a possible candidate. You can choose to follow this or ignore it, but I definitely recommend that you learn more before making a decision."

The woman had a tribal pendant around her neck—on it was a pattern of lightninglike zigzags around a central circle—and I asked her about it. "Somebody gave this to me on a beach in Mexico," she said. "They said it was a Navajo protection symbol."

I do not think the world is orchestrated as a paranoid conspiracy designed to fit my wildest fantasies. Yet I had an intuitive, uncanny sense that this symbol had been sent to me—to show me that I was being protected, somehow, that I was being taken through a process. Even though I was freaking out, I had to trust that the process was good. In shamanic cultures, synchronicities are recognized as signs that you are on the right path.

I was in Berlin because Laura's father had been stricken with cancer. The entire family was assembling for the weekend. Because Laura was pregnant and wouldn't be able to travel later, she was staying with her parents for several weeks.

Whenever I was left alone, I found myself walking around the house and making conducting gestures again. I was afraid I was turning into an obsessive-compulsive, but I could control the gestures when other people were around. At night, I barely slept.

With my eyes closed, I watched vivid imagery unfold in little film loops. I saw a huge column of fire shooting up from the center of Stonehenge. I envisioned myself walking into the flame column, being obliterated and shooting up into space. This felt so good that I did it again and again. Then I saw the surface of another planet, covered in coral and spongelike growths. A smirking alien was standing next to one of the sponges, and he kept flowing through the organic folds of

the plant, then reassembling himself. He and the plant were fused in magical symbiosis.

Finally I fell asleep. I dreamt of a boy standing in the woods, yelling over and over again at the top of his lungs: "Long live ethnopharmacology!"

Another night I had two extremely vivid dreams in which I was pursued by a bearded man. In one dream I threw a party in an apartment where I once lived. Aggressive strangers showed up and stole my books from the shelves. A bearded man came up to me.

"I used to live here," he said.

"Do you want to come back?" I asked.

"Yes," he said.

Back in New York, I still felt very strange—fizzy and nonordinary, with a buzzing around the temples. It was my second night at home and I was jet-lagged. Ten minutes after I turned out the lights and got into bed, a large mirror in the other room fell off the wall and loudly crashed facedown on the floor. It didn't break.

All night I dreamt that the bearded man was hitting me in the head with a pillow over and over again, and laughing as he did it. I tried to hit him back but my swings were feeble misses.

When I awoke in the morning, feeling groggy, I went to get a yogurt from the refrigerator. I opened the tightly closed silverware drawer and reached for a spoon. Right under the spoons was a large and ominous bug. It did not look like a New York bug at all—it was winged, honey-brown, with a long curly tail, and it quickly wriggled out of sight.

I screamed and slammed the drawer shut.

Fuck, I thought. The DPT trip had unleashed an angry poltergeist in my house. How could this be? I have never had a belief or even the slightest interest in poltergeists or the occult, but the signs couldn't be more obvious. Suddenly I was in the midst of something for which I had no frame of reference, no preparation. What had I done? Once again, as often before, I cursed myself for my fascination with these chemicals.

I walked around in a panic. I went to the East Village and sat at a cafe. On the way I stopped in a Tibetan Buddhist store. I asked the clerk if he had any symbols of protection, and he sold me a small metal

dorje, the Tibetan lightning bolt symbol used in meditation. I still felt fizzy. I had a tingling around my left temple and my left hand was buzzing strangely. Clutching the *dorje* in my fist, I called Charity and told her about the situation.

"Oh man," she said. "We've got to clean that thing out of there before your girlfriend comes back with the baby."

It turned out that Charity, from her days of San Francisco witchcraft (modern paganism was another phenomenon I had always dismissed), knew all about exorcisms and entities. She had carted with her, all the way from Mexico, an entire kit bag of magical implements, including a large and beautifully smooth black obsidian ball that someone in Palenque had given her and some quartz crystals. While I knew that quartz was used for shamanic healing, to realign energy patterns, I did not know that obsidian was considered to have the power to absorb negative spiritual energies. "This ball is so excellent, it just sucks all that stuff right up," Charity said. She also brought ceremonial candleholders (tacky little sculptures of a cat and an elephant, which became the Egyptian god Bast and Indian god Ganesh for the duration of the ceremony), and Aleister Crowley's elegant Tarot cards. I met her and we went back to the apartment.

"I can already feel it," she said when we were in the lobby. And it was true—the air in the building seemed electrically charged, more so in the elevator, and in the apartment, the charge was like a distinct physical presence. Charity put the obsidian ball down on the ground in the center of the living room. We both watched, astonished, as it took the ball an extremely long time to stop trembling, finally rotating in smaller and smaller circles until it came to rest. She organized a quick magical ritual, consulting the Tarot cards several times. I had also never given Tarot cards much thought, but now I was watching them as if my life depended on it—I felt, in some obscure and woozy way, perhaps it did.

She picked a card with lightning bolts all over it, "Swiftness." "So we'll be swift," she said. She picked "Fortune," suggesting a change for the better. She picked "Futility"—my heart sank—but opposite it, "The Queen of Cups," my court card. "Because your card is a water sign, we've got to do something with water," she said, quickly analyzing the situation like a technician faced with an engineering problem. She

soaked the obsidian ball in salt-water, then held it in the toilet and flushed a few times.

"Take that bullshit out of here," she commanded.

At the end of the ritual, the atmosphere in the apartment seemed changed, cleared out. It was, we thought, safe again.

It was safe until later that night, when I returned from visiting Tony. Once again, I felt the apartment crackling with an electrical occult buzz. My temple and left hand started buzzing again. I had been jokingly complaining to Tony about the supernatural forces taking such obvious manifestations—a falling mirror, a big bug. It was all so silly, so comic book–like, even flirtatious. Once again, the joke seemed to be on me as I lay in bed and felt increasingly creeped-out and panicked.

I went into the living room and sat in front of the obsidian ball. I picked up the *dorje* and chanted a bit—nonsense words, Asiatic-sounding, insectile, similar to what I recalled of the Secoya language, came into my head and I called them out. "Ching! Ching! Gada-ching! Gada-gada-ching!" I rapped the hard surface of the black ball with the Tibetan *dorje,* then I held it in my palms and looked into the polished surface of the obsidian sphere.

My entire visual field turned gray.

All I could see were a few rectangles of refracted light in the center of the ball; thick grayness covered everything else.

I turned away from the ball and looked around the room.

After two seconds, my vision went back to normal. I looked back at the ball.

My entire visual field turned gray yet again.

I grabbed my jacket and ran out of the house. Once in the street, I called my friend Michael from my mobile phone. Michael is twenty years older than me; a poet and novelist with an impressive knowledge of alternative healing and indigenous cultures; it was he who first told me about ayahuasca. For an hour, as I paced around the streets, Michael tried to calm me down. He told me some Buddhist meditation techniques to "get you back in your body." He told me that even if there were some "other" out there, and he was not convinced there was, I had to recognize that aspects of my mind had manifested all of this stuff. "It takes two to tango," Michael said. Rather than fighting against it, I could accept it, integrate it within myself.

Michael told me to imagine a buddha hovering over me, shooting pure white light through my body, turning me into blinding white light, flushing everything negative or bad into my central channel where it would go into my intestines and ultimately come out of me as shit. At the end of the meditation, Michael told me to imagine this buddha coming down to me as I merged with the white light.

I followed his instructions, and it seemed to help. I felt selfless, emptied out, and even empathic toward my entity visitor. Soon I fell asleep. By the next morning, the world had returned to normal. There was no more buzzing, no more tricks.

This story may seem ridiculous, yet the psychic reality of the DPT encounter and its aftermath overwhelm most ordinary events. I offer it as a cautionary tale. There are aspects of the story that remain, for various reasons, impossible to tell. Suffice it to say that after DPT, I strongly suspect an ordinary death is not the worst thing that can happen to a human being. There may be far worse fates.